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## ABSTRACT

Prepared for the 75th anniversary of the external studies program at the University of Queensland, this essay includes a brief introduction and an introductory account of the first four directors of the program. Background information provided in the introduction includes the establishment, educational philosophy, funding sources, and administrative organization of the University of Queensland, as well as a rationale for the founding of the external degree program in 1911. Institutional developments during the tenure of each of the directors are described together with biographical data on: (1) Thomas Edward Jones (1911-1937); (2) Thomas Thatcher (1938-1948); (3) Edward Colin D. Ringrose (1950-1957); and (4) Frank Jackson Olsen (1958-1971). Each biography includes the director's background and qualifications, method of his appointment, problems encountered upon appointment, his vision for the university, his targeted objectives, and his major accomplishments. A list of references completes the document. (JB)

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# MEN OF VISION: A University Challenge to Distance Education

by Ronald D. Kitchen

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Division of External Studies

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**Ronald D. Kitchen**

School of External Studies  
and Continuing Education  
University of Queensland

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# **MEN OF VISION**

A University Challenge  
to  
Distance Education

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Division of External Studies  
University of Queensland

MEN OF VISION  
A University Challenge  
to  
Distance Education

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## FOREWORD

The external studies programme of the University of Queensland has been in continuous existence since 1911. It is the oldest in Australia and among the oldest in the world. At a time of growing interest in the techniques of distance education, it seems particularly appropriate to pay tribute to the work of its pioneers.

As yet, no general history is available. In recent years Rupert Goodman, Jon Stanford and Michael White have all added to our understanding of the programme's origins, but research continues. The present essay does not attempt to anticipate any broader survey which may emerge from work in progress, being simply an introductory account of our first four directors, Jones, Thatcher, Ringrose and Olsen.

Ron Kitchen is especially well qualified to provide this perspective, having himself worked with Professor Olsen and taught external students for almost twenty years. I am most grateful to him for preparing so readable a momento for the Division's seventy-fifth anniversary.

John Chick  
Director of External Studies  
and Continuing Education

# INTRODUCTION

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## in the beginning

The idea of a University for the State of Queensland began to find acceptance around the beginning of this century. The idea developed from the belief that the people of Queensland were ready to establish and maintain a major institution of scholastic and professional learning.

For those men and women who favoured such a proposition, a University probably symbolised social and cultural maturity and a pride of achievement for a distant outpost of Empire. It may have conjured up ideals of classical learning along the historic lines of Western civilisation, interwoven with local aspirations for a similar place of learning close to home.

For others with more pragmatic thoughts about commerce and industry, the establishment of a University would mean local graduates for the major professions, such as Law,

Medicine, Engineering and qualified entrants to business houses.

For teachers, public servants and others serving the State in sparsely populated areas, a University would act as a means of helping them to raise their educational standards. Country students in distant parts of the State would be able to gain qualifications from examinations set at University level.

There were others who questioned and doubted the value of having a University. They sought to reject the heavy financial burden which would fall upon the taxpayers, many of whom, living far from Brisbane, could see themselves as gaining little from such a venture.

For some with recollections of England, a University would mean a place for the children of the fortunate and wealthy. They saw neither value nor purpose in a costly metropolitan institution for an idle minority; a cornerstone of social class distinction and privilege.

Nevertheless, from out of the many ideas, thoughts and opinions, there developed a group of determined men (and women) who valued the purpose and the results of a better educated population. They felt that it was their duty to promote the idea of a University for Queensland, in spite of the many difficulties, especially those of distance.

To them, many of the problems of distance would be overcome by the appointment of suitably qualified staff. So when government finance became available, their ideas finally bore results, and a university became a legal and an academic responsibility for the people of Queensland.

### **A University for Queensland**

A University of Queensland Act was drawn up, signed and made law on 10th December 1909. It incorporated and endowed the University of Queensland with a sum of £10,000 payable annually. The promoters of the Act

sought, not only to answer the aspirations of many people in Queensland and to achieve the best possible return for public money, but also to embody therein the democratic principles of equality and justice. They hoped that all those who were able and willing would benefit from its provisions. Their open educational intentions, as stated in the Preamble, read,

Whereas it is desirable to promote sound learning, to encourage original research and invention and to provide the means of obtaining a liberal and practical education in the several pursuits and professional life in Queensland, and for such purposes to incorporate and endow a University open to all classes and denominations of His Majesty's subjects ...

They insisted that the University of Queensland Act, 1909, should incorporate educational responsibility for the people of Queensland as a whole, no matter where they lived, but especially for teachers, key figures in any educational system. In the specific words of the Act,

Provisions shall be made by the Statutes for the granting after examination of degrees and the diploma in Education, to persons engaged in the profession of teaching or other persons in cases where such teachers or other persons are unable to attend lectures at or in connection with the University.

[Section 20(4)]

They upheld the principle of anti-discrimination in the Act with specific reference to equal rights for women, and Section 30 reads,

This Act and all the benefits, advantages and privileges of the University shall extend to women equally with men.

With reference to University administration, the Act defined the governing bodies as the 'Senate' and the 'Council',

and incorporated statutes for executive control under five major 'Standing Committees'. The Senate was made the major controlling body, with the responsibility for management of University affairs and property, and with the power to appoint staff.

The Senate had to consist of 20 members: 10 were to be elected by secret ballot through Council and open to any responsible citizen who wished to serve; and 10 members were to be elected by the Governor in Council. This corporate body was endowed with directional guidelines and final decision-making powers based on collective opinion.

The first meeting of Senate was held in Parliament House, George Street, Brisbane on 22nd April 1910 when Sir William MacGregor was unanimously elected the Chancellor for five years. Of his leadership it is recorded opinion,

The University was most fortunate in its first Chancellor, Sir William MacGregor who ... made the position of Chancellor that of the real, not the nominal, head of the University. The first years of a university are difficult years, demanding on the part of those responsible for its government, a heavy sacrifice of time and energy. These are the years when the direction the new institution will take is determined and its permanent characteristics are formed. A strong man at the head of affairs with a clear conception of the academic requirements of a young democracy was above all necessary in Queensland and the rapidity with which the new university obtained recognition in the academic world, is due not only to the individual efforts of members of the Senate and Staff, but also to the synthesis of those efforts through the influence and experience of the University's first Chancellor, Sir William MacGregor.

[UQ Calendar, 1910-1922, pp. 8-9. 1923]

These are strong supportive words of an historian writing in the early nineteen twenties, but they are based on the fact that the first Chancellor and his Senate members were no by-standers. They became actively involved in the first five provisional committees, that is, the Finance Committee, and those of Administration, Building and Site, Curriculum and Library until the arrival of the first four professors, three of whom came from the United Kingdom (H.J. Priestley, J.L. Michie, A.J. Gibson and B.D. Steele) who were appointed in 1910.

There were local members of that first Senate, like J.D. Story, J.B. Henderson and the Hon. A.J. Thynne who served as Chairmen of many committees during the first fifteen or more years. They provided guidance, made suggestions and helped in forming the major characteristics of the new university. This was true especially of J.D. Story, who later became Vice-Chancellor and a strong supporter of the University of Queensland's responsibility to distant students unable to attend courses on campus.

### **The University of Queensland: the beginning**

The formal opening of the University took place on 14th March 1911 when sixty students were matriculated. The inaugural academic ceremony, however, did not take place until 1st June in that year when, in glowing and idealistic terms, the first Chancellor publicly outlined in a policy speech, the aims and objectives and future direction of the new university.

In that opening speech, the University of Queensland was not only going to be a university which "prepares men and women for the highest duties in the social, political and industrial life of the State", but "a great centre for research" [UQ Calendar 1910-1922, p. 12]. Whatever the ideals, it would, however, be many years before the University of Queensland became 'a great centre for research'.

Yet, it was from this kind of dedicated men, knowing what they wanted, full of idealism, self-involved and with down-to-earth pragmatism that came the impetus for their venture. If their vision was well beyond local financial resources, then others, following in their path, would find the means and forge ahead. Such was their conviction.

During the year 1910, the Faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering were formed, allowing various Departments to be organised for receiving students and in session before the end of 1911. With three Faculties and some Departments in operation, the thoughts of Senate turned to the possibility of creating two new Chairs; one in Commerce and the other in Agriculture. These new subject areas would require financial support, making financial demands beyond the original Government of Queensland grant of £10,000.

Not wishing to call directly upon the Government, the founders started a fund raising project and additional money was collected locally in Queensland and in England. The total sum collected proved to be inadequate, but enough to encourage the Senate on 10th March 1911 to request from the government a further £2,500 per annum. The Registrar's letter, addressed to J.D. Story who was at that time employed as Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, explained the Senate's request in the following words,

The Senate after giving careful and prolonged consideration to the financial position of the University find that the endowment of £10,000 per annum, as provided under Section 28 of the University of Queensland Act of 1909, together with the estimated revenue from other sources, will not be sufficient to meet the expenditure necessary for the provision of suitable and efficient instruction in the faculties which have been established in the University ...

I am to point out that the four Professors and the



*The University of Queensland*

*University of Queensland Archives*

*UQA 5178 B6*

Administrative Staff have already been appointed and that applications have been invited from the following Lectureships in English and History; Logic, Ethics and Psychology; in Geology and Physics ...

[UQA. Ex. St. Establishment 1911-1938]

A month later, J.D. Story replied favourably on behalf of the government, but stipulated that the extra money grant was conditional upon the University giving recognition to the special need of evening and external students. The terms and conditions laid down in the government's reply included the giving of evening instruction on a liberal basis, the protecting of the interests of evening students, and the giving of.

such special facilities as may be possible for the gaining of the degrees, diplomas and certificates of the University.

A further condition was to ensure that the government could send persons training for the position of teacher without fees to the University.

But the most challenging stipulations placed upon the University of Queensland Senate were the provisos that related to students living at a distance from the University. The government's reply required,

That a Correspondence Study Department for the benefit of external students is organised and placed under the control of a Special Officer.

That the conditions in regard to external students shall be fair and reasonable.

In response, the Senate acknowledged with thanks the government's willingness to provide a further £2,500 per annum, and at the same time, hoped with reference to the external provisions, the government would accept the Senate's interpretation of what was 'fair and reasonable'.

According to the University's reply, external student status would be granted on an individual basis and to "those persons who present a statutory declaration that they are unable to attend such lectures." [UQA. Ex. St. Letter 12 April 1911]

The Senate's reply explained that external students in the Faculty of Arts would be able to proceed to a degree in that Faculty in the same time as internal students. External students, however, who were taking Science subjects, would have to fulfil the same laboratory requirements as internal students. This condition was particularly difficult as many local country institutions did not satisfy university standards. Nevertheless, Senate would endeavour to comply with the government's request in regard to external Science students.

With the assurance of further financial support, the Senate set about establishing a correspondence department to serve external students and finding a qualified graduate as an Officer-in-Charge of the Department. There was strong feeling that the Officer-in-Charge ought to be a Queensland teacher with wide subject knowledge and teaching experience, as most external students would be secondary teachers.

Such an Officer would have to be able to cooperate with his internal colleagues, to show initiative, to chart an unknown educational path with skill and tenacity of purpose. He would be expected to develop administrative processes and maybe even teaching/learning guidelines for external students. Fortunately, the chosen applicant proved himself to have a large measure of these qualities.

# THOMAS EDWARD JONES 1911-1937

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## the first director

Of the men who applied for the position of Officer-in-Charge of the Department of Correspondence Study at the University of Queensland, Thomas Edward Jones wrote of himself in the following precise terms,

I am 47 years of age and since 1873, I have been associated with education in Queensland.

In 1874, I obtained a State School Scholarship and entered the Brisbane Grammar School in the following year. In 1878, I won the £10 prize for the best pass in the Sydney Junior Public Examination, and two years later closed my school career winning the Bowen and Cockle prizes at the School. I passed the

Sydney Senior Public Examination, winning the Greek Medal and being placed prox acc in Latin and Algebra, I was awarded the second Queensland Exhibition.

In 1881, I matriculated at Sydney University winning the Cooper II Scholarship for Classics. In each of my years at the University, I took honours in Classics and Mathematics and I also passed in First Year Science. I took my B.A. degree at Sydney in 1884 ...

Jones went on to say that in the following year, he was appointed to the staff of the Brisbane Grammar School. There he taught a wide range of subjects, with advanced teaching in Classics. Outside the classroom, he undertook a considerable amount of private coaching and became involved in many extra curricula activities within the school.

In addition, he believed that he had had considerable experience in the management of special school departments and in committee memberships. Due to his great interest in sport, varied scholastic activities and students' careers on leaving school, he had inaugurated the *Brisbane Grammar School Old Boys Association*. During his twenty-six years on the teaching staff of the Grammar School, he had taught many boys and felt that he knew many of them personally. There would be many he knew who would most likely avail themselves of the proposed university extension work.

Finally, in the obsequious style of his time, Jones wrote,

I have never yet undertaken any office without the conscientious desire to discharge all its obligations, and if I have the honour to be selected for this position, I shall try in every way to gain the confidence of the external students, to aid them, to acquire as complete and thorough knowledge of their subjects as possible, and to do all in my power to make our University, a University of Queensland in

reality ..

I have the honour to be, Sir  
Your Obedient Servant,

Thomas Edward Jones.  
[UQA. T.E. Jones]

Of those whom Jones requested testimonials to support his application for the position of Officer-in-Charge, the Headmaster of Brisbane Grammar School wrote of him as a sympathetic teacher with a kindly openness towards others in the following words,

Mr Jones' experience of teaching extends over a long period and a variety of subjects ... In all the subjects which he has undertaken he has proved himself an interesting and successful teacher ... he has shown himself distinctly sympathetic, as in his classes, with a decided power of entering into the feelings and point of view of others.

He has a thorough grasp of the working and organisation of the School, and his suggestions are eminently practical, showing a clear appreciation of detail and necessary limitations. His clerical work is exceedingly neat, methodical and prompt.

[Signd. F.S.M. Housefield, 5 June 1911]

Of other colleagues who worked with him, their supportive testimonial comments stressed Jones' organisational ability, initiative, grasp of detail and service to others. In the words of a retired teaching colleague who knew him as pupil and teacher for over thirty years,

He is a most faithful servant, never sparing himself or failing to perform a task allotted to him, and as a secretary or keeper of records, with a full knowledge of intricate examination details it would in my opinion be hard to find his equal.

[Signd. R.A. Roe, 10 May 1910]

The appointing body for the position of Officer-in-Charge was obviously impressed by his application and interviewing qualities and recommended him to Senate. Jones was made Officer-in-Charge for an initial period of five years. His title was changed to Director of Correspondence Studies as from 1st August 1911.

Soon after appointment, he was requested to go overseas for a five-month period to study the operation of correspondence schemes in the universities of North America.

### **The Jones Report on Correspondence Systems**

Without any clear plan of where he might profit from his travels overseas, Jones set off on 27th August 1911 and returned on 22nd January in the following year. A month later, he presented a detailed report of his journey overseas to the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Senate, a report which was later prepared for presentation to both Houses of Parliament as Appendix B in the *Second Annual Report for the Year 1911* of the University of Queensland; such was the importance placed upon Jones' document by the Senate and the Government of the day.

Jones' account of his visit overseas, undertaken for the purpose of studying the operation of correspondence teaching, was a closely written document of some 5,000 words in length. It referred to a journey of about 30,000 miles by sea and land, to visits of at least fifteen universities concerned with correspondence in some form and to Jones' impressions of correspondence activities during his stop-over of two to ten days at each Centre. The report concluded with specific proposals for a correspondence operation at the University of Queensland.

Of certain university centres that Jones visited, like the State University of Michigan, he wrote little. Similarly, of Columbia University in New York, the only comments he made were,

This University is working on the same lines as ours, holding classes in the afternoon and evening, and on Saturday mornings. The work in these classes is identical with that done by the day students, and both ... sit for the same examination, leading to the same degree.

[p. 18]

Of the State University of Wisconsin at Madison, Jones reported most favourably and at length, and pointed to the major democratic principles of operation, as follows,

I was greatly impressed with the thoroughness and enthusiasm with which it discharges the obligations of communicating the resources of its knowledge to anyone in the State, on the principle that, as it is a State Institution supported by State money, everyone who contributes to that money has a right to its instruction.

[p. 16]

In some detail, Jones described the administrative procedures in registering the correspondence students, the setting and marking of assignments, the need for textbooks and Travelling Libraries, of Local Study Centres and other supportive aids for correspondence students in what was known locally as the 'Utilitarian University'. Jones was obviously interested and stimulated by what he observed and recorded from his contact with local staff and students at the State University of Wisconsin with its enrolment of 4,000 correspondence students.

In review, it could be argued that the Jones Report was not a balanced evaluation nor was the subject matter thoroughly studied. It is even possible that the published version was an 'improved version' for government members, but there is little doubt about Jones' central theme. He supported most favourably the idea of offering correspondence courses to external students and providing them with an opportunity to obtain degrees and

other qualifications.

Yet, like the experienced and qualified teacher that he was, he quickly pointed out, to the readers of the report, the many difficulties that are faced by correspondence students, saying, "The work of a correspondence student is pronounced by the authorities to be unquestionably much more strenuous than the corresponding residence course ..." [p. 17] and that the external student needed to be helped in a variety of ways to overcome some of these difficulties.

Finalising his report, Jones made three major proposals and outlined an experimental scheme for the first year of operation. He proposed in the following words,

My idea of the main lines to which the Correspondence Study of our University should be conducted is:—

- i It should synchronise with the internal work;
- ii It should be tested by the same examination paper and receive the same credit;
- iii External students should as far as possible receive the same assistance as internal students.

and then he outlined the first year operation and the subjects that could be offered, as follows,

I respectfully submit for the present year the following experimental scheme, to be subsequently modified as experience suggests:—

That four courses be offered in Latin, English, Pure Mathematics, and Logic and Psychology. Each of these belongs to a double course so that no student is likely to be hampered in his full selection of subjects; and as an external student can only carry two subjects a year, the area of choice is sufficiently wide. I suggest only four courses because my intention is to send weekly assignments

corresponding to the lectures delivered; these assignments I propose to prepare by attending the lectures and taking my own notes of them.

I am in favour of placing external students on the same footing in respect to time and fees of the course as evening students.

[p. 19]

The Jones Report was accepted as a working basis, and his task of serving both the University of Queensland and the external students began to develop.

### **The Early Years**

Under the guidance of Thomas E. Jones, a beginning was made in the year 1911 with two to three external students. From the start, and during the following years, Jones demonstrated his remarkable ability of being able to cooperate effectively with his internal colleagues who taught the day students.

He was able to sit in their lecture rooms, listen to their subject matter and make notes which he then prepared as weekly assignments of work. After checking and seeking from the lecturers approval of his written version, the course material was despatched to external students. In the beginning, the Department of Correspondence Study was very much a one-man effort with clerical assistance.

Although a well qualified graduate and experienced teacher in his own right, he submitted to working mainly as an 'efficient reporter' to ensure the synchronisation of external course work. The written and printed course material was well prepared and both colleagues and external students gave recognition to its high quality. Professor A.J. Gibson, one of the three professors from the United Kingdom, was able to write of him when his five-year appointment came up for review,

In recommending the re-appointment of Mr. Jones, I wish to report that he has loyally carried out the

wishes of the Senate, in association with the Department, and it is due to his energy that the difficulties inherent in the work are being met in a satisfactory way. He has worked in loyal accord with his colleagues, and the reports that he has submitted to the Senate from time to time bear witness to the growth of the work and to the increase in its value to the community. The amount of detail work to be carried out is very great and Mr Jones has never spared himself.

[UQA T.E. Jones, Sigd. Professor A.J. Gibson, M.A.,  
President, Board of Faculties.]

With a successful re-appointment, Jones continued his work, seeking to provide an efficient and a well-organised service to external students, which by 'duty bound' had to be fair and reasonable. His skilful and pedagogical interpretation of his duties was reflected in the ever-increasing yearly enrolment of external students.

By request and personal desire, Jones accepted in 1919 the position of Honorary Secretary to the Public Lectures Committee. This voluntary work gave him some opportunity to visit country towns and meet external students. In addition, he was able to serve the University in its policy of decentralisation that aimed at bringing the University into direct contact with country people.

The quality of his correspondence material continued to bring him high level support. Some ten years after his original appointment, another of the three Professors brought out from the United Kingdom to help establish the University of Queensland, and with whom Jones had to work closely, wrote of him,

The task of reporting a considerable variety of specialised lectures is no easy task. It is to the credit of Mr Jones that the reports issued are so very definite a help to students who cannot attend the actual lectures. He has throughout worked loyally with

the lecturing staff and has always been ready to cooperate with them towards securing the best presentation of their lectures.

I beg to recommend his re-appointment.

[UQA T.E. Jones, Sigd. Professor J.L. Michie, M.A.  
Cantab, President, Board of Faculties, 11 October  
1920]

The success of the correspondence system and its unique teaching features with a specialised department was heard beyond the State, and enquiries were received from The Sydney Technical College and other sources. Nevertheless, there were growing internal teaching problems and opposition to correspondence studies.

### **Criticism of the Correspondence System**

The external course system was mostly confined to the subjects taught in the Faculty of Arts. The work of correcting assignments submitted by external students was only partly accepted by internal staff and often thought of as 'an act of grace on the part of internal lecturers'. The increasing enrolment year by year of external students was not related to additional staffing and new enrolments encroached upon the work-load of the internal teaching staff.

In addition, there was spoken and unspoken academic staff criticism of the correspondence method whereby an external student, without attendance at lectures and discussion groups, could attain the 'pass' level degree by assignments and examinations only. It was a method which ignored the values of social and intellectual interpersonal contact, the activities of University campus life, and the library services and other facilities associated with a University in a large city. The correspondence system contrasted sharply with the many learning opportunities of the internal teaching processes on campus.

In part answer to some of the criticism about external teaching, Professor J.L. Michie, Chairman of the Faculty

of Arts, requested Jones to report on the work of the Department of Correspondence Studies so that he might be better informed. On the basis of the Jones' report, Michie stated in his summary-letter dated 28th April 1922 entitled 'Scheme of Correspondence Studies' that there were three classes of external students. There were (i) matriculated students proceeding to the 'pass' degree of Bachelor of Arts, (ii) State School teachers desirous of obtaining the Class I qualification of the Department of Public Instruction, and (iii) graduates studying out of self-interest or qualifying for the higher degree of M.A.

Of the ten subjects then available, five were perennial and included English I, Latin I, Pure Mathematics, Logic and Psychology I, British History I. The other five alternated over two years, and included Applied Mathematics II, English II, giving a total of fifteen subjects in the two years 1920 and 1921. The summary continued,

For the work of the Department, the Director has an Assistant and two typists. Full notes of the lectures in the subjects for the year are taken by the Director and his Assistant; with all references for outside reading and details of any work set to the class. Any work sent in by the external student is criticised and returned and all enquiries they make are answered as promptly as the stress of work will allow. The lecture notes are posted weekly, leaving the University on Thursday so that they are in the hands of the majority of the external students for the weekend ...

Their examination results are quite satisfactory and the students are unanimous in their appreciation of the assistance which they derive from the Department. About 30 External Students have obtained the degree of B.A., during the nine years in which the Department has been in operation.

The Director's conception of the function of the Department is that it should bring the University work

well within the reach of genuine students who are absolutely barred from otherwise deriving any benefit from the existence of the University.

[Quoted from Jones' report by Professor J.L. Michie, Chairman of Faculty of Arts to Dean of Faculty of Arts, 28th April 1922. UQA Ex. St.]

Michie, summarising the report, made reference to the advantages and the disadvantages of the external system, and commented that it was a 'system of competent reporters' and its existence was 'justified'. And so the Department of Correspondence Studies continued its work throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s under the strain of increasing numbers of external students, academic criticism and lack of adequate resources.

The external enrolments of about 30 students in the year 1912 had mounted by the year 1933 to around 325 external students. There were requests for an increased number of courses to be made available, for more study help, for improved marking assistance and for other improved conditions. In response, the Board of Faculties of 1933 finally instituted a review of the Department now known as the Department of External Studies.

### **The Re-appraisal and Proposals for the Department of External Studies**

The Board of Faculties (i) requested Jones to produce a survey of the work of the Department of External Studies, then (ii) formed a small independent sub-committee to look into the Department's operation, and (iii) received a Memorandum on external teaching from the Dean of Arts.

(i) In response Jones, in November 1933, produced a report entitled *Survey of the Work of the Department of External Studies*, in which he wrote most favourably about the external student response to their studies, about their success rate in examinations, about the loyalty of his staff and the value of the Department to the University of Queensland. But he had to admit to the increased and

heavy work-load on himself and his staff.

According to his Survey, Jones had by 1933 restricted his teaching responsibility to the teaching of Latin I, Philosophy I and II, Mathematics I. His two graduate assistants, Miss Darwall and Miss Smith, taught English I and II, French I, Law, History, Political Science II and Economics I. Jones explained in some detail his teaching method in the words,

I inspire External students with the idea that the University is alive to the numerous difficulties they have to face, and willing to render them what assistance is possible. At the beginning of each year, I issue an invitation to write for any necessary information regarding the details of their work; and at the end of each Term, they receive another Memorandum, which enables them to check their Notes for the Term ... These memoranda, I have been told by some students, act as a spur on their industry and perseverance; and practically all the letters I receive from External students contain some expression of grateful appreciation of what the University is doing for them.

[UQA. Ex. St. 14 November]

In his report, Jones stated that further improvements had become necessary, and in summary put forward several major proposals which he believed would help the external system. These proposals included the need to,

- visit external students so as to be able to discuss their difficulties and form study/reading circles where numbers were sufficient.
- encourage external students to attend the University of Queensland as day/evening students for at least one year of their degree course.
- establish a circulating reference library.

Although these three important proposals were not introduced during the time of his directorship, they helped

to formulate later policy and supported the Sub-Committee Report of 1933 on the Department of External Studies undertaken independently by Professors Adcock and Stable.

*(ii) Sub-Committee Report on the Department of External Studies: 1933.*

In addition to the Jones' Survey in 1933 of his own Department, a Sub-Committee (Adcock and Stable) was invited to survey, assess and report on the work of the Department. In their six page survey, the Sub-Committee made comparisons over several years of day, evening and external enrolments. They looked at the success and failure rates of the three groups, and evaluated favourably the working of the external system. The writers commented,

In 1933 for the first time in the history of the University, more than fifty per cent of the students within the Faculties of Arts and Commerce were external students and that the figures for 1934 indicate that this preponderance is being maintained.

The report went on to point to the Department's successful operation and the benefits to the University of Queensland in the following terms,

External students are scattered throughout the State and it is obvious that the influence exercised by the University and its reputation as a teaching body ... depends in no small degree on such students. It is imperative therefore that the University should do everything in its power to assist the external students in overcoming some of the many disadvantages under which they pursue their academic studies.

[UQA. Ex. St. p. 5, para. 2]

In addition to making reference to the *Survey* written by Jones, the Sub-Committee confirmed his opinion about the need for improvement in the external system and made

several major suggestions. These were in summary,

- The formation of University Study/Reading circles in suitable centres throughout Queensland, beginning with Townsville, Rockhampton, Ipswich with others to follow.
- A change in the method of instruction away from taking notes of the lectures given to internal students.
- The reorganisation of the staff of the Department of External Studies to include a Senior Assistant to help the Director so that the staff can visit local centres.
- The establishment of an External Studies Library with a stock of about 1,000 books of which the largest proportion should be course textbooks at an estimated cost of £500.

[UQA. Ex. St. pp. 6-10]

If both Jones and the Sub-Committee were favourable toward the continuation of the correspondence system with increased support, there was one brief, but significantly opposing Memorandum presented in the same year.

(iii) *Memorandum on the Department of External Studies: 1933.*

In addition to the two previous reports, the Board of Faculties received a Memorandum from the Dean of Arts, who reviewed briefly the growth of the Department of External Studies from 1911 to 1932 and made mention that the Department of External Studies was established at the request of the Queensland Government.

The Dean of Arts pointed out that the Senate at the time of accepting the extra financial grant of £2,500 believed the number of students who would avail themselves of the external provisions would increase for a few years. After then, they would gradually dwindle and become non-existent. The Dean went on to state that the assumption

made had proved incorrect and that by 1932, "forty-seven per cent of the students in the Faculties of Arts and Commerce are enrolled as external students and less than nineteen per cent are studying under normal conditions of day students." He concluded that this imbalance was most unsatisfactory for the Faculties and for the University of Queensland.

The Dean was critical that external students acquired in his words, "nothing of the very valuable part of academic life" and that their knowledge was restricted to textbook learning and lecture notes. In his opinion, the synchronised examination system was little more than a 'test of memory'. While acknowledging that the day, evening and external students took the same examination, the 'pass' degree in Arts was being judged as well below the standard of similar degrees offered by the Southern Universities in Australia. This state of fact, he believed was a serious handicap to the University of Queensland's internal students and the 'pass' degree status.

To overcome the problems as he saw them, the Dean of Arts proposed the establishment of a Diploma for teachers, as about ninety-five per cent of the external students were teachers. But those teachers who wished to qualify for a University of Queensland degree should have to attend the University in the same way as day and evening students. He believed that such a scheme would remove the stigma from the current 'pass' degree. In other words, the Dean was probably justifiably stating that some other means of professional training for teachers ought to be introduced.

The Board of Faculties met on 16th May 1934, discussed the three surveys on the work of the Department of External Studies and gave general approval to a re-organisation of the Department. There was tacit acceptance of all three reports without positive action being taken. Jones was still in charge of the Department, but now in his seventies and working on a temporary contract basis. Three years later, his services were finally

terminated on 31st December 1937.

During that final year, Jones could look back with much satisfaction. He had successfully established external teaching and the Department of External Studies as a major academic activity of the University of Queensland. He was able on reflection to write the Registrar and say,

On reviewing what I regard as my life's work, I am gratified at the success which has attended the operations of my Department on the lines which I originally laid down. The number of external students have increased every year from 30 in 1912, when the Department commenced to function, till in 1936 my list contained over 400 names; this is partly due to the extension of the scope of the work to include Class I candidates and students in Commerce, Law and Journalism. I know that I have gained the full confidence of all my students, and the percentages of successes in the Annual Examinations — about 60% — is evidence of the soundness of the methods employed; financially too, the position is satisfactory, as the Department is now more than self-supporting.

[UQA. T.E. Jones. Sigd. T.E. Jones, Director of  
External Studies, 5th March 1937]

To his Chancellor, 22nd April 1938, he acknowledged that his success was due,

... in no small degree to the unfailing support I have received from the Senate, the willing and valuable cooperation of my colleagues and the loyal and devoted assistance of my staff.

[UQA. T.E. Jones]

Thomas Edward Jones, the founder and father figure of the external teaching system at the University of Queensland, continued to live quietly in Brisbane to the age of 84 years, dying peacefully in his sleep on Tuesday 24th August 1948. He left behind him a basic educational

system of university teaching and support for those students who live at a distance from the University. It centred upon synchronised equivalence of teaching and examining of internal students on campus, but left to others the task of developing his basic ideas which needed wider academic acceptance and increased financial support.

# THOMAS THATCHER

## 1938-1948

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### the second director

On the retirement of T.E. Jones as Director of the Department of External Studies, the Board of Faculties, accepting the need for departmental re-organisation and improvement, appointed a Special Committee to advise them about the future direction and duties of the new Director when appointed.

Over the preceding years under Jones, the position of Director had become more administrative and clerical, due to the ever-increasing number of external students. In addition, the University of Queensland had a commitment to centralise its activities, coordinate its extension services and to cooperate with ancillary educational services such as the Workers Educational Association in country towns.

After deliberations, the Special Committee recommended to the Board of Faculties that the position of Director should be advertised as a triple responsibility, and proposed as follows,

- a For the guidance and assistance of external students in which matters he would have to control a staff, exercise academic initiative and himself take part in the preparation of material.
- b For the punctual and accurate compilation of the University Calendar in the performance of which duty, he should be thoroughly familiar with the working of the whole university organisation.
- c For the secretarial and executive charge of the University Appointments Board involving capacity to judge fitness for particular positions and to conduct personal negotiations with prospective employers.

[UQA. T. Thatcher]

Of the forty-eight applicants for the vacant position, there were several who were well qualified in one respect or another for the position of Director. But the appointing committee had much difficulty in selecting a single applicant with the allround qualifications they considered appropriate. This difficulty resulted in only four applicants being interviewed, of which only two were recommended for final selection. Of these two, the major contender was Thomas Thatcher.

### **Thatcher's Application and Background**

Although his age of fifty-one was considered a drawback, Thomas Thatcher was strongly recommended for appointment on the grounds of his personal qualities, his wide experiences, and general qualifications. Also in his favour, he was preparing a Master's thesis on 'Hume' for the University of Melbourne and some twenty years earlier, he had worked for a short time as a temporary assistant in the Department of External Studies under T.E.

Jones.

In Thatcher's letter of application dated 25th October 1937, he made reference to his interpretation of the appointment by stating,

So far as I can judge from paragraph seven (7) of the conditions of appointment, the position seems to call for a knowledge of men and their conditions of life, organizing ability, capacity for detail, tact and skill in handling staff, familiarity with the routine of editing and publishing magazines and/or periodicals, secretarial experience, loyalty to colleagues and the University together with a general background of scholarship to enlighten and inform such qualities.

Thatcher went on to give details of his early schooling.

My primary schooling was obtained at Laidley South, Woodhill and Brisbane Central Boys' State Schools. In 1899, I sat for the State Scholarship Examination and came first in Queensland. For five years (1900-1904), I attended Brisbane Grammar School where I was awarded the Lilley School Medal for proficiency in both the Lower and Upper Schools. I also passed the Sydney Junior and the Sydney Senior Public Examinations, matriculating in various schools of the University of Sydney.

I then joined the Education Department as an Assistant Teacher on probation at the Richmond Hill State School, Charters Towers where I remained until I became a duly classified teacher.

Although a classified teacher, qualified possibly on a one or two-year teacher training basis, Thatcher was keen, like many Queensland teachers, to upgrade his qualifications through University study. He continued with the words,

At that time, there were rumours that a University

would soon be opened in Queensland, I decided to sever my connections with the Department and await developments nearer to Brisbane. I accordingly returned to Laidley Creek and remained there farming until the opening of the University of Queensland in March 1911, when I became a Foundation student.

Thatcher completed his studies by graduating at the University of Queensland with First Class Honours in Philosophy and awarded the Government Gold Medal and the Archibald Scholarship. It was at that time that he worked for a few months as a Temporary Assistant to T.E. Jones before he was appointed the Private Secretary to His Excellency, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams in 1915. He was also at that time involved in tutoring at the Women's College and working as a temporary Lecturer in Logic and Education as a stand-in for a Mr. Seymour who was on study leave in England.

In addition to his academic success and experiences, Thatcher reported in his application that he was well acquainted with methods of printing and publishing magazines, periodicals, weekly and daily newspapers. In 1919, he was special Parliamentary Reporter for the *Daily Mail* and leader-writer for the *Sunday Mail*.

Of his executive and administrative experiences, he believed that he had much to offer, having been continuously involved in local community affairs where he lived and having served in a number of major executive/secretarial positions around Stanthorpe. For example, when farming at Glen Alpin, he was involved in organising a Reform Party and when Private Secretary to the Minister of Labour during 1929-1932 depression period, he organised the social relief system.

Finally, as in the role of the Director of the Department of External Studies, Thatcher foresees,

... the possibility of the expansion of the activities of

the Department of External Studies to keep pace with the widening scope of the University, it may not be amiss to enumerate some general qualifications ...

[UQA. T. Thatcher]

Thatcher refers to his first-hand knowledge of several branches of farming, his intimate knowledge of the problems connected with the manufacturing and business life, and his considerable practice as a public speaker.

[UQG. No. 10, October 1948, p. 6]

### **Supporting Academic and Personal Qualities**

Thatcher, at the time of his application, had had experience in many facets of life and was able to draw upon a large number of testimonials in support of his endeavours to secure the position of Director. Of those who knew Thatcher academically, a former Lecturer at the University of Queensland wrote,

Mr Thatcher was one of the ablest pupils in the Honours School of Philosophy whom I had the privilege of directing while I was a member of the teaching staff at your University. I still recall his work with pleasure and the hours of penetrating and searching discussion of grave philosophical problems which we then had together. It was a stimulating experience to be his teacher. But in addition, I would like to emphasize that in Mr. Thatcher this power and vigour of intellect were combined with two other things of no less value and importance; firstly, a balanced and mature character resolutely devoted to the service of life's finer ends and secondly, a clear insight into and firm grasp of practical issues and of life's daily routine which he consistently handled with refreshing wisdom and common sense.

[Signd. P.A. Seymour, Fellow and Tutor of Jesus College, Oxford, 30 August 1937]

The Principal of Brisbane Teachers' College wrote favourably on his behalf and referred to Thatcher's verbal

skill in the words,

During twenty-five years of my acquaintance with Mr Thomas Thatcher, he has consistently stood out as a scholarly gentleman. His interest in literature and philosophy and his ability to express himself both orally and on paper, are the characteristics ordinarily attributed to him.

[Signd. J.A. Robinson, 5 October, 1937]

When Thatcher made his application, he was teaching in Toowoomba at the Technical College and his Principal in very high praise of him wrote,

His qualities for leadership are exemplified in the esteem in which he is held by all members of the staff and by all the students whom he inspired with his own capacity for work. He is a born organiser and therefore I delegate to him much organisation ... His organising ability and his literary skill and knowledge are well illustrated by his Editorship of 'Acta', published by this College.

[Signd. J.A.C. Wilson, 1 October 1937]

### **The Second Director of External Studies**

Thomas Thatcher was offered appointment as the Director of the Department of External Studies at a salary of £575 per annum for a period of five years, starting on 1st February 1938. He was instructed to work under the guidance of the retiring Director, T.E. Jones, until 31st March, and then to assume full responsibility as Director to the Department from 1st April 1938.

The position of Director had to include responsibility for the editorship of the University of Queensland Calendar and the Manual of Public Examinations; he was also Secretary of the Public Lecture Committee and of the Appointments Board and the Secretary of the Standing Committee of the Council. These varied clerical positions involved him in extensive responsibilities across the



*Thomas Thatcher*  
1886-1948

University in many different directions and required a detailed and intimate knowledge of the University's operation.

Once appointed, Thatcher devoted himself to the service of the Department of External Studies and to the University. He accepted the general principles and guidelines of external teaching as laid down by his predecessor, T.E. Jones. These involved the continuation of the policy of synchronisation of external courses to those offered internally to day and evening students and the preparation of external students for sitting the same examinations.

Soon after his appointment, the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Federation wrote to the University to say that the Federation was very interested in establishing correspondence courses at the University of Sydney, and asking whether the University could provide detailed information about procedures and courses offered to external students. The University Registrar replied, basing his letter on a report from Thatcher who refuted the idea that the Department of External Studies offered correspondence courses. The Federation was informed that the work of the Department was based on 'internal equivalence', and explained as follows,

... we do not set papers to be worked and corrected or in any way throw responsibility on the student to do work more than is done in the University course ... if he cares during the course of his studies to ask questions about specific difficulties we try to help him best we can after consulting with the Lecturer or Professor concerned.

The main activity of the Department — outside this personal contact — is to take reports of the lectures as delivered by the Professor or Lecturer, to submit the report (after transcribing them) to the Professor or Lecturer concerned for editing, if necessary, and

thereafter send them to our students in the particular subject.

The whole process is simple in the extreme, provided continuous care is exercised over details and it permits of indefinite expansion, within the limits of the courses set by the Senate.

[Report from Thatcher, 6 October 1939: UQA. Ex. St. Establishment 1939-50]

In review, the Thatcher report of 1939 suggested that little had changed in the external methodology of course production since it was introduced by T.E. Jones in 1911. There had, of course, been extensive increases in enrolments of external students and some minor course and administrative changes, but basically the Jones system continued cheaply and, within restrictive limits, effectively.

Financially, the Department of External Studies was operating satisfactorily and was mostly self-supporting. According to calculations made in a statement dated 27th March 1942, Thatcher costed departmental income per student on the basis of charges for course work. This he costed at £7.7.0d for one subject, £9.9.0d for two subjects and £13.13.0d for three subjects, or in other terms, seven, nine and thirteen guineas. In the same financial statement, Thatcher costed course production per student at £4.11.7d with material costs at 12s.6d, making a total production cost per year to each student at £5.4.1d for each subject. From these simple calculations Thatcher stated that the total departmental income could be assessed on average number of external students which in 1941 was calculated at 512.3 students.

### **Increasing Enrolments**

The number of external students continued to increase and Thatcher, supporting the idea of making more subjects available, extended the services of the Department. By the mid-forties, it was possible to gain qualifications externally

in the Faculty of Arts to the level of Degree of Bachelor of Arts and Diploma in Journalism; in the Faculty of Commerce, to the level of Degree of Bachelor of Commerce, Diploma in Commerce and Certificate in Accountancy; in the Faculty of Law, to the level of Bachelor of Law; and under the Board of Studies in Education, to the level of Diploma in Education and Certificate in Education. The total number of subjects offered to external students in 1946 was fifty-three.

Although during the war years of 1939 to 1945 community demands for educational facilities eased, attempts were made by the University of Queensland to offer external courses to serving military personnel anywhere in Australia, or the South Pacific and to the returning service men and women during the post-war period. It was a time when the University Senate was most conscious of its responsibility to provide study opportunities as part of a supportive war effort, and later, to help serving nationals to overcome the 'lost years'.

The correspondence teaching of the University during and at the end of the war did not go unnoticed, for several enquiries about the external system were received from interstate and overseas. But, it was the enquiry from G.W. Luttrell, Private Secretary to Minister for Public Instruction in the Queensland Government that brought forth from Thatcher references to criticism of the external system.

In replying to a request for a report on the work of the Department of External Studies, Thatcher in May 1946 confirmed dutifully that the Jones' system of synchronisation was being maintained unchanged. His academic staff were acting as efficient reporters for the most part. Referring to an earlier statement by Jones, he quoted, that their taking

"the place of the external students in the lecture room in order to give them as much as possible of the benefits derived by students attending the

lectures ... has been in operation from the beginning." It still is.

[UQA. Ex. St.]

In the same report, Thatcher drew upon comments made by Professor Michie in 1922 about the advantages and disadvantages of the external system, and pointed out that Michie on balance considered the system 'justified'. The advantages, according to Thatcher's reference to Michie, were that external students gain in self-reliance, individual independence, in perseverance and in learning how to fend for oneself. But, they were excluded from the general intellectual and social life of the University, from having first-hand experience of the teaching methods and personal attitudes of internal lecturers, from discussions and library facilities. Thatcher, like a dutiful servant, made no direct criticism nor asked for improvement.

Within limits, the University correspondence system was a successful and a viable operation, and many students achieved their examination objectives up to 'pass' degree level. The limits of the scheme, however, presented many difficulties for external students and too many dropped out from their studies and failed, blaming themselves rather than the system. Unfortunately, no other equivalent tertiary correspondence system existed for the distant student, and so they were in a sense a 'captive audience' in Queensland and unable to find alternative means of tertiary study.

Thatcher's response to the students' problems was not to attack the controlling authority and demand improved facilities on behalf of the external students. Instead, he sought solutions to one of their major difficulties — the lack of personal contact with the lecturing staff and campus life — by the introduction of a one-week Study School on campus.

### **Study School**

Early in 1947, Thatcher made a tentative inquiry among

external students about the holding of a one-week Study School during the teachers' vacation period in August of that year. Writing of his projected Study School both as a formal academic and informal social experience, Thatcher stated,

The activities of the school will not be wholly confined to the lecture room, for it is intended that students should leave with at least conception of the essential spirit of University life. On the Wednesday afternoon, students will be invited to inspect the new University at St. Lucia. On their return, the visitors will be entertained at an official dinner, at which they will have the opportunity of meeting some of the senior officers of the University and of the Students' Union.

The School is being financed by the students themselves, and there is no doubt that its initial success is largely due to their interest and keenness, and without which the External Studies Department could have accomplished little. If the spirit of high expectation which is apparently animating the students, can be justified by the success of the school, the benefits to the students will undoubtedly be great, but that to the University may well be greater.

[UQG., No. 7, September 1947]

The first Study School, conducted by the Department of External Studies under Thatcher's guidance during one week in August of 1947, fulfilled expectations. Initially, it was very much in the nature of an experiment with many unanswered questions involved. No previous practical experience was available to show, for example, how best to utilise students' time. No-one knew what was the best kind of lectures for such occasions, nor what study preparations were required both by staff and external students. What was the best way to involve the external students once they arrived at the University? Such were the questions and problems for the participants, for no-one

had any previous experience to guide them.

The Study School of 1947 was a bold innovative move. Although it was no longer than one week, Thatcher engaged the approval of the Vice-Chancellor who officiated, the cooperation of internal teaching staff and the involvement of the external students who attended and paid for the opportunity to do so. It was attended by over 100 students from many parts of Queensland and New South Wales.

On Monday morning, 18th August, the Vice-Chancellor, J.D. Story and supporting academic staff in ceremonial robes attended the official opening of the Study School. Later in the week, at the official dinner, the Vice-Chancellor by his presence gave official blessing and support to the School, and in a speech, reminded the external student body of an early slogan in the Department of Public Instruction about taking schools to the country pupils. This earlier slogan paralleled the University of Queensland's responsibility to external students in the phrase, 'If the student cannot come to the University, the University must go to the student'.

In the Vice-Chancellor's opinion, he is reported to have said,

Personally he regarded the Department of External Studies as an exceedingly useful and valuable section of the University: one of the vagues of the day was de-centralisation, through the Department of External Studies, the University had been de-centralised almost since its inception: the Department had helped materially in making the University, and it was intended to be, a University for Queensland and not for the metropolitan area only, and there had not been any lowering of standards, any loss of prestige, any sinking of morale.

[UQG., No. 8, December 1947, pp. 2-3]

In many ways, the first Study School was no answer to those carping academics who, often without any professional training as teachers, preferred all teaching to be under their authority and control on University campus. But by general approval, the School's resounding success assured a long series of Annual Study Schools for many years. Thatcher's organising ability, his skill in cooperating with people, his initiative in making ideas work, and the experimental data that he collected for improvements ensured future progress and continued acceptance.

In addition to the success of the Study School, there were two major adjuncts. One was the realisation on the part of the attending students that association and cooperation among them brought many mutual advantages. By sharing study problems through discussion and personal contact, many students could help each other. In the planning of the Study School, Thatcher had developed a programme of informal social activities to encourage the external students to come together as much as possible outside the lecture rooms. He had tried to ensure that this kind of interpersonal contact would lead to the students themselves seeing the advantages of get-togethers and the forming of local country study groups throughout Queensland on their return.

The second adjunct to the Study School of 1947 was the establishment of a correspondence circulating library for external student use. This was to become one of the unique features of the University of Queensland's system of external studies and a kind of teaching workshop that challenged conventional library procedures.

### **Correspondence Library**

During the Study School, Thatcher put forward to the body of external students the idea of establishing a reference/textbook circulating library for their special needs. His proposal was well received, and encouraged by their support, Thatcher made an appeal in and outside the University for gifts of books, money and special texts. It

was to be a very modest affair and little more than a tentative experiment in sharing books from a central source.

The appeal for library books during and after the August Study School in 1947 brought a total of some 400 books, about £90, of which £50 came from the Student Union, and a further sum of money from the University, leading to a library stock of about 600 books for the opening day, 1st May 1948. [UQG. No. 10, October 1948]

The initial planning was for a reference library which would stock essential texts. There would also be books for reading that went beyond academic course work and provided the kind of intangible material referred to as the social-cultural background to studies. It would in time go on to forge a strong link between academic teaching staff and the library operation so as to create a cooperative mixture between external teaching methods and the use of library books. It would break many of the traditional University library practices and become extended to include the loan of audio-visual material such as records, tapes, copy prints and photo-copying of journal articles. [UQG. No. 22, May 1952]

In fact, basically, Thatcher's library idea was an insightful and unusual pedagogical conception with practical teaching applications. It took its creative foundation from a teacher who was concerned, not only to put books on loan to external students, but also to guide students, to provide educational contact and to give essential support to their endeavours. It was an idea that was destined to become a most successful student-staff library workshop.

It is possible that Thatcher's correspondence library was not fully understood due to lack of funds, problems over distance and postage costs and a shortage of required texts. There was also a lack of professional planning and library organisation over book selection and possible alternatives. These inherent problems and many others

*Early Morning Registration*



"Glad to see you again, Mark. How is life in Snake Gully?"

*A Study School scene several years later (DES Newsletter)*

would reveal themselves in the course of time, but it was a start; the beginning of a specialised circulating library service for external students.

### **The Closing Days**

In the recording of time, Thomas Thatcher barely saw the foundation of the Study School and the Correspondence Library for he died in Sydney on 23rd May 1948. During his ten years in office, he not only continued Jones' basic principles of synchronisation, but he endeavoured to provide a teaching service in the most generous and varied terms that his heavy work-load and restricted finances allowed.

The continually increasing external enrolments had placed much strain upon the external course system and its operation. Developmental changes were now more than ever obviously needed on an organised and planned basis. With the passing of Jones and Thatcher, it was time for external planning, for aims and purpose and future policy. External teaching had developed under Thatcher, and in his honour and as a tribute to his work, the University of Queensland renamed 'his' library, *The Thomas Thatcher Memorial Library*, affectionately referred to as the *Thatcher Library*.

# EDWARD COLIN D. RINGROSE 1950-1957

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## the third director

The external studies system, as operated from the University of Queensland, not only offered to teachers and others, opportunity to obtain qualifications in several faculties, but allowed students to interchange their external or internal status, according to their place of work and domicile.

Teachers, public servants and others, when transferred from country areas to Brisbane, were able to continue their studies without interruption as part-time evening students. The Jones system was flexible enough to allow external students who obtained a one-year study leave of absence to continue as full-time day students and so shorten their study programme.

It was therefore not surprising that the new Director of the Department of External Studies had completed part of his second degree as a Queensland external student. He came to the position as a well-qualified teacher-academic with a wide background of educational experiences and interests.

### **The Third Director by Request**

Edward Colin Davenport Ringrose was born in Herberton on the North Queensland Tableland on 30th June 1899. He received his secondary education at Townsville and Brisbane Grammar Schools, before entering the University of Queensland as the holder of a University Scholarship in 1916. He graduated in the Faculty of Science in 1920.

According to reports, he showed keen interest during his student days in teaching and in education, an interest which led him after graduation, to become a Science master at Rockhampton Grammar School (1920-1924), then to Brisbane and Ipswich Grammar Schools between 1925 and 1928. During these years, he continued his studies and gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Queensland and a Diploma in Education from the University of Melbourne.

With the support of these further qualifications, he sought and secured in 1928 a lectureship at the Brisbane Teachers' Training College. There he remained until his appointment in 1937 as the first Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Queensland.

At the time of his appointment as a university lecturer in Education, one testimonial in support of his application stated,

... at all times (he) manifested deep interest in the education of the youth of the State and has brought to bear upon the problem a breadth of outlook and understanding of great value in that particular sphere. He is possessed also of attractive personal qualities

which have materially assisted him in his work, and I can confidently recommend him for any position requiring initiative, scholarship and discretion.

[T.G.H. Jones, Department of Chemistry, University of Queensland, 9 May 1935]

Of his skill and enthusiasm for teaching, the Headmaster of the Brisbane Grammar School wrote,

I regard him as one of the best teachers we have had ... He has clear ideas himself, has the power to transmit them and to induce interest and enthusiasm in others.

[R.A. Kerr, 8 May 1935]

After appointment as a Lecturer in Education, Ringrose pursued his special interest in Education as an academic discipline. In February 1942, his first five-year contract with the University was renewed, and two years later he applied successfully for study leave to attend the School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

On his return from Melbourne where he graduated as a Bachelor of Education, he was invited to accept responsibility for the establishment of a Faculty of Education, leading to the qualifications of Diploma in Education and the Bachelor and Master degrees. His basic work and successful interpretation of his duties in this direction earned him promotion in 1946 to Senior Lecturer in Education, and one year later, to Associate Professor. This was well-merited recognition during those strenuous years of his valuable academic services to the University of Queensland, especially in the area of Education.

It was also during these years that he gave himself unsparingly to the national war effort and became a part-time Senior Psychologist to the Industrial Welfare Division of the Department of Labour and National Service. Although requested to do so, the University felt unable to free him for military service, so Ringrose became an

honorary consultant with the Department of Labour and National Service and involved himself in vocational guidance for which he was exceptionally well qualified.

Outside these two major areas of activity, his academic work and his national war effort, Ringrose revealed himself as a man of many interests. He managed to find time and energy in varying capacities to become involved in such organisations as the Teachers' Union, the Anti-Tuberculosis Association, the Marriage Guidance Council, the Creche and Kindergarten Association, and for six years a member of the University of Queensland Senate.

Ringrose's deep interest in teaching and Education inevitably involved him in external studies. A large percentage of the external students were Queensland secondary teachers and their professional studies were very much his concern as an Educationalist. Unknown to him, however, at this time, it was in this area that he was to make his mark and introduce into the external system new and innovative ideas for further development of external teaching and in the re-organisation of the Department.

### **Re-organisation of the Department of External Studies**

Criticism of the external system continued to circulate among the internal academic staff, many of whom felt concerned about educational standards and maybe even threatened by this mode of learning and teaching. Yet, the Department of External Studies continued to increase in number of external students. By the year 1948, the number had risen beyond the one thousand mark, having trebled during the ten years of the previous director.

Some of the criticism was not unfounded. The ever-increasing enrolment pressed heavily upon both the internal and external staffs who provided the academic courses and study guidance. But in addition, the triple responsibilities placed upon Thatcher had involved him and his staff in many extraneous duties, such as the compiling

of the University Calendar and Manual, work with the Appointment Board, and several secretarial services which drew him away from concentrating upon the administration of his Department and his teaching duties. The Study School and the Correspondence Library had also increased their work-load.

To help find solutions and direction for the Department of External Studies, a Committee of Deans was appointed after the death of Thatcher to examine the work of the Department and make recommendations. It was to this Committee that K.G. Hamilton, the Acting Director, brought to their notice the need for some re-organisation of the administrative staff with a senior appointment, the need for well-qualified academic staff with a special interest in external teaching at the level of Assistant Lecturers, for the establishment of Country Study Centres and several other proposals for improved working of the external system.

The Committee of Deans appointed a Sub-Committee as a working party. Associate Professor Ringrose, who was being suggested as the next possible Director of External Studies, was also requested to review, assess and report on the operation of the Department of External Studies. Ringrose responded to the invitation and on 27th June 1949 tabled a detailed document of some thirty pages with six schedules, entitled *Report on the Department of External Studies*. It was a major review by a well-qualified and experienced educationalist who knew how to collect and assemble relevant data, and present it in a cohesive and cogent manner. [UQA. Ex. St.]

In summary, the contents of the Ringrose Report referred to the Department's administrative operation and the presentation of academic external courses. It factually described the external system and proposed many recommendations of a practical nature, of which the most central was the formation of a representative Board of External Studies to influence and develop the external

system. Another essential feature was the accepting of the Jones' principles of synchronisation to be coupled with a better qualified academic staff with external teaching interests. The reporting methods, as adopted by Jones, had become almost unworkable due to specialist internal teaching, work-load problems and some opposition to the reporting method.

The Ringrose Report, while indirectly critical of the University of Queensland external system and its many weaknesses as a teaching process, confirmed the educational value of the Department's work to the people of Queensland. It was a service which Ringrose believed reflected most directly upon the University itself. But if external teaching was to be equated with the value of internal teaching, then an improved pedagogical methodology was a major necessity in the teaching of external studies.

Ringrose never questioned the basic right of every qualified individual, handicapped by distance or personal circumstances, to be provided with study assistance. The vital question for him was how best to create a service for those who sought to become better informed and educated. His report with his recommendations together with the reports from the Committee of Deans and the Sub-Committee were presented to J.D. Story, Vice-Chancellor, who responded with a detailed *Memorandum*.

### **Vice-Chancellor's Statement and Proposals**

It was obvious that J.D. Story was most impressed and persuaded in his decisions by the Ringrose Report. As he acknowledged, it was upon that report and the report from the Committee of Deans that he based his *Memorandum* of 17th August 1949 entitled, *Re-organisation of the Department of External Studies*. It included eleven major proposals, of which the first two concerned the establishment of a Board of External Studies, and read as follows,



*Edward C.D. Ringrose*

*1899-1957*

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- 1 That a Board of External Studies be created.
  - 2 That the Board be representative of all the Faculties concerned with the External Studies together with —
    - i The President of the Professorial Board;
    - ii The Director of External Studies;
    - iii Two representatives to be nominated by the Department of Public Instruction;
    - iv The Principal of the Teachers' Training College.
- [UQA. Ex. St.]

The creation of this representative Board led to a new status for external studies with its Director as an 'ex officio' member of the Professorial Board and with access to the Senate.

The third major proposal referred to the supervisory and advisory duties of the Board in thirteen clauses. Five of these directives were based upon Ringrose's educational recommendations for a more autonomous and effective teaching system for external students. They included the need to (i) define and develop aims and objectives of the external system, (ii) improve departmental efficiency and close cooperation with the internal work where practical, (iii) develop a more effective teaching methodology for external studies, (iv) train staff and establish Country Study Circles, and (v) maintain an efficient library service for external students.

Proposal number four of the Vice-Chancellor's *Memorandum* stipulated that the Director of External Studies should be the Chairman of the Board of External Studies. The fifth proposal directed that Associate Professor Ringrose should be appointed the Director of the Department of External Studies and, at the same time, act in a dual capacity of Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education. This same proposal included the appointment of K.G. Hamilton to the position of Assistant Director to the Department.

Although the *Memorandum* contained several important proposals, perhaps one of the more important was number six which directed the establishment of three Country Study Centres in the words,

That Study Circles be established at Townsville, Rockhampton and Ipswich as from the beginning of the academic year 1950 and that arrangements to that end be put in train forthwith.

[UQA. Ex. St.]

In the following November, Ringrose was appointed to the position of Director as from 1st January 1950 with the double responsibility of Associate Professor of Education.

### **Improved Academic and Teaching Image**

Soon after his appointment as Director, Ringrose set about creating an improved academic and teaching image of the external system. Not only did he put into operation the major administrative proposals for re-organisation of the Department of External Studies as an autonomous department, but he strove to increase academic acceptance of external teaching as a valuable experience for mature adults.

Late in the year of his appointment, Ringrose (1950) published a review article which outlined the external studies operation and the recommendations from the Committee of Deans and others. It contained a brief summary of the improved organisational proposals and the improved teaching strategies for the future. Underlying the contents of the article is a quasi theoretical interpretation of internal learning and teaching processes at the University of Queensland and how these processes can be transcribed into an external mode of operation. He made no attempt to present the external studies system as a valid mode of learning and teaching for mature adults, studying in the workplace and outside the artificial sanctuary of the Ivory Tower.

Ringrose believed that the Department of External Studies possessed a highly experienced staff whose principal responsibility was the interpretation and adaptation of the contents of internal courses for external students. His academic staff was also involved in a limited amount of internal lecturing and examination work of equal status to that of internal staff.

Of the function of the Department of External Studies, Ringrose believed that there were two major principles operating and these were based on *effective guidance* and *self-study*. The first, he saw as the concern of the academic staff and the second he believed was the responsibility of the external student. Ideally, he believed as an educationalist that the external student should be taught to understand and appreciate the nature and scope of external courses, to see their purpose and core problems, and to perceive in Gestalt theory the parts that provided a patterned whole for total understanding of course contents.

### **Basic and Special Services**

Ringrose masterfully demonstrated his grasp of the essential underlying problems in the operation of an external teaching service. To overcome some of the high student failure rate through drop-outs, their many study problems and the educational inadequacies of the system, he proposed a two-pronged approach through improved *Basic Services* and developed *Special Services*. The *Basic Services* related to external course material in the form of factual lecture material, synopses of courses, notes and study guides. The *Special Services*, some of which were already in operation, were designed to cater for the specific needs of external students, such as University Country Centres, Study Schools, Library. They represented the importance that Ringrose placed upon individual and personal contact with external students. [Ringrose, 1953]

The development of the *Special Services* constituted a

landmark in the history of the development in the methodological processes of learning and teaching externally. They have probably acted as guides and examples beyond the University of Queensland external operation as other institutions have sought to establish their own external services. There are two major *Special Services* to which some reference must be made. They are the *University Country Study Centres* and the *Teaching Methodology*.

### **The University Country Study Centres**

One of the major *Special Services* in the time of Ringrose was the establishment of Country Study Centres, starting with the first three official Centres in 1950. They were sited at Townsville, Rockhampton and Ipswich. These Centres were followed by other study centres throughout Queensland in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction which provided accommodation in State High Schools and Technical Colleges where appropriate.

Ringrose established the Centres as an integral part of the Department of External Studies under the control of the Director with local cooperation. They were set up to provide local students with tutorial classes and to be staffed by part-time local tutors, except Ipswich which received staff from Brisbane. Small branch libraries were incorporated into the major Centres for external student use. Such services promoted the decentralisation of University activities and approximated to internal discussion/library services. With or without library facilities, local groups of students were starting to function throughout Queensland and meeting in local schools during the evening.

### **Teaching Methodology**

The acceptance and establishment of University Country Study Centres and Local Libraries for External studies were part of Ringrose's overall strategy for the development of external teaching and the creation of the 'part-time external undergraduate student' with similar facilities to those on

university campus. The most outstanding features of the Ringrose period was the development of external teaching methodology and the interpretation of internal learning/teaching methods in operation in the University of Queensland.

Based on the assumption that the best and most productive method of teaching and learning was the internal lecturing programme, group discussions and the general interpersonal life on university campus, Ringrose attempted to translate these features into an external Special Service.

For example in 1951 Ringrose introduced a printed *Orientation Course* for external students which paralleled internal attempts to cultivate the 'right' attitudes to university study. There was a booklet entitled *Aids to Study Services*, which was a printed supplement on course selection and guidance, on the writing of assignments, on how to get help and how to study at the University.

In the area of course selection and guidance, Ringrose encouraged his staff to produce individual outlines to courses, referred to as the *Introductory Outline*. This enabled external students to plan, prepare and orientate themselves to their proposed courses. To lessen the burden of individual correspondence about courses, Ringrose prepared and printed the *External Studies Handbook*. This contained brief descriptions of courses, course regulations, and details to enable external students to plan ahead.

To increase the personal element between the Departmental staff and students, he gave full support for his staff to visit whenever possible the Country Centres as visiting Tutors. In addition, he himself developed a personal *News Letter Service* to circulate departmental and university news and personal items that might interest the distant student. Each term, his two *Director's Letters* were issued to explain departmental policy, offer

explanations, refer to special and general study problems and in many ways forge a personal link.

And while Ringrose was promoting the re-organisation of the Department of External Studies, developing Country Study Centres and improved external teaching, he was also most supportive of extending the external services into Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific area on behalf of the University of Queensland.

### **Expansion into Papua New Guinea and South West Pacific Islands**

During the war and in the post-war period, the University of Queensland made external courses available to members of the Armed Forces, not only in Queensland, but in all States of Australia and overseas. By this action, many ex-service personnel qualified for full-time and part-time acceptance to the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme.

Going even further afield, the University of Queensland accepted educational obligations of both national and international importance and significance in the South-West Pacific area by the expansion of its services with Papua New Guinea, by participating in the Australian Correspondence Scholarship scheme, and by accepting foreign students in South-East Asia as part of the Colombo Plan operation. [UQG. No. 32 September 1955, pp. 14-15]

Of particular significance was Ringrose's involvement in the external teaching service in Papua New Guinea. Because of the increasing number of Commonwealth Public Servants, an enlarged repatriate population and the absence of professional, cultural and educational facilities, external courses were made available throughout Papua New Guinea.

In 1954, the Commonwealth Government established in Port Moresby a Public Service Institute to provide study

opportunities in cooperation with the University of Queensland and with the Teachers' Training College. Going further than merely offering external courses, the University of Queensland adopted a process of liberalisation of the matriculation requirements for adults who were scholastically inadequately qualified by giving a more open access to university study. As far as possible, Ringrose and his staff effectively stream-lined the administrative and academic procedures to provide the maximum possible service to one of Australia's important and developing neighbours.

### **Closing Note**

In review, it can be said that Ringrose guarded the essential features of Jones' basic principles of synchronisation, but rejected the idea of his academic staff being little more than 'efficient reporters' to internal teaching staff. By appointment, they were well-qualified and experienced academics with a special interest in external teaching, and members of an autonomous department.

He developed the educational value of the Annual Study School, the major benefits of the Thatcher Memorial Library and extended these services by building a whole edifice of special educational services and teaching methodology. With the establishment of a representative Board of External Studies, the Department and its staff became more central to the working of the University of Queensland and open to the input of ideas from Board members. His personal involvement and interest in external students and their educational endeavours became major characteristics of this period.

It was unfortunate for the University of Queensland and the body of external students that after no more than seven years in office, Ringrose died on 1st May 1957 at the age of 57 years. In his honour and memory, the University of Queensland named one of his 'special services' — the Country Study Library — for external

students, *The Ringrose Libraries*.

# FRANK JACKSON OLSEN 1958–1971

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## the fourth director

Frank Olsen was on study leave in Britain when he received notification of his appointment as the new Director of the Department of External Studies. At fifty-four years of age, he was academically well qualified with several degrees in Education to the level of doctorate and with much experience in teaching at secondary and tertiary levels.

### **Supporting Background**

According to Olsen's application for the position of Director of the Department of External Studies, before his departure on study leave as a University of Queensland Senior Lecturer in Education, he was born on 27th November 1904 in Brisbane. There he received his early

schooling at Bowen Bridge and Grovely State Schools. After passing the local Scholarship examination, he became a foundation pupil at Brisbane State High School, and qualified in due time for admission to the University of Queensland from where he graduated as a Bachelor of Science in 1925.

In the following year, he started to teach at the State High School in Mt. Morgan, a fairly prosperous Queensland country town. He soon established himself among the staff as a competent and congenial member with a lively interest in school sport that gave him student popularity. In Mt. Morgan, he met and married a good-looking secondary school teacher. She became his life-long partner, though she never bore him the children he would have loved so much.

Young Olsen did not stay long at Mt. Morgan. As a teacher he was ambitious and forward-looking. He sought promotion and obtained a position as a Science Master in Townsville Grammar School in 1929, where after five years, he became Senior Resident Master-in-Charge of Science and Mathematics. This position incorporated the additional role of being the School Sportsmaster. He was popular and successful. But after a stay of eleven years, he sought a tertiary appointment in 1939 and became a Lecturer in Diploma Physics at Newcastle Technical College in New South Wales.

It was during this period that he enrolled as an external student in the School of Education at the University of Melbourne. He completed a Diploma in Education in 1940 with an equal top place in the First Class Honours list in Practical Teaching. One year later, he successfully qualified as a Bachelor of Education and studied on to the level of Master of Education in 1943, the year that he was promoted to Head Teacher of Preparatory (General) Studies at the Newcastle Technical College where he was still teaching. The position involved the foundation of a new branch of Technical Education, serving young people

and returning ex-service personnel. The position gave Olsen his first major administrative position.

Soon, however, he was on the move again, and in 1946, he was appointed to the Sydney Technical College as the first Deputy Lecturer-in-Charge of the Department of Preparatory Studies. This Sydney post provided him with a wealth of experience in every phase of Educational Theory and Practice, from syllabi design to student interviewing. It gave Olsen opportunity to infuse others with his special interest in audio-visual material and teaching techniques. In addition, he gained confidence in his leadership as an Educational Administrator with the respect of those who worked for and with him.

Thus it was in 1950, when applying for the position of Lecturer in Education at the University of Queensland, he could justifiably state,

Over a period of 25 years, I can ... claim that I have had extensive teaching experience, both in Queensland and in New South Wales of secondary level Chemistry and both secondary and tertiary level Mathematics and Physics ...

I am an enthusiastic user of films and film-strips in the teaching of science and have made film-strips for my own use ...

[U.Q.A. F.J. Olsen]

In support of his application for the position of Lecturer in Education, Olsen called upon the Professor of Education at Melbourne University who wrote,

... (he) is a teacher of outstanding ability in Mathematics and Physical Science ... He has a very good mind and possesses ability and enthusiasm, combined with judgment and experience.

[Signd. G.S. Browne, 12 July 1950]

and for evaluation as an administrator, a Sydney colleague of Olsen wrote,

His capacity for administration and organisation has contributed much to the success and expansion of this Department in the post-war years ... Olsen is always investigating and experimenting with new educational techniques. The numerous teaching aids now used throughout the State of New South Wales are due largely to his direction and suggestion ... His own teaching and lecturing are exemplary.

[Sigid. W.R. Crisby, Dept. Technical Education,  
Sydney, 25 July 1950]

After his appointment as Lecturer in Education to the University of Queensland, Olsen took up his duties with the same degree of enthusiasm as characterised his earlier career, devoting his energies in several directions. He became involved in the teaching activities of science teachers in Queensland and travelled extensively to attend Science Teachers' meetings and to organise seminars on modern developments in Science Education. He was a foundation member of the Australian Science Teachers Association and became the President in 1956.

Outside his special concern for science teaching, he demonstrated in several ways his wider interest in Education. He sought involvement in the work of the Australian College of Education and the Australian Branch of the British Psychological Society and lectured publicly on educational themes. In addition, he devoted himself to research and undertook a doctorate thesis entitled 'Causes of Failure in First Year Examinations in an Australian University' which was supervised by his departmental Professor, F.J. Schonell. After he was awarded the degree of Ph.D. in 1955, many of the thesis recommendations were implemented within the University, and Schonell, who later became his Vice-Chancellor, often publicly expressed appreciation of Olsen's research and educational interests.

### **Appointment as Director**

The University of Queensland indicated in 1957 its intention of appointing a new Director to the Department of External Studies, and Olsen made application in August before going on study leave in January 1958. To that application, Olsen sought the support of several colleagues and one of his most ardent supporters wrote,

He is a Queenslander whose experience in departmental and private Secondary Schools has given him capacity to maintain excellent relationship with the principals and staff, as well as in understanding of the problems facing an undergraduate student in country areas ... he revealed a high degree of administrative and organisational ability ... possesses many fine personal qualities. He is most sincere, industrious, tactful, poised and dignified.

[Signd. J.C. Greenhalgh, 5 November 1957]

On taking up his duties as Director of the Department of External Studies, Olsen publicly acknowledged the debt he owed to his predecessors in building up an efficient organisation that they had adapted to the special problems in Queensland, and believed,

... it is my responsibility to maintain the reputation of the Department of providing its 2,500 scattered students with both the opportunity to further their studies and the tutorial assistance to do so in a reasonably satisfactory manner.

Then with reference to the recent departmental expansion, he continued,

I am particularly interested in some of the more recent extensions of the services of the Department of Public Service Institute at Port Moresby, to the proposed Public Service classes at Darwin, and to the Colombo Plan Correspondence Scholarship

scheme, by which up to 100 students receive assistance with their studies from this Department. I am naturally looking forward quite enthusiastically to the interesting and challenging possibilities of my new appointment.

[UQG. No. 42, December 1958, p. 10]

Olsen settled down as Director to the responsibilities of his office and sought to consolidate the external studies service to ever-increasing enrolments. Like his predecessor, Olsen recognised full well that economic necessity, rather than educational principles, had determined the methods used to teach external students, and in large measure, still continued to do so. He was well aware that the first thirty-five years of the external system were based on correspondence methods and were essentially dependent upon the written word.

He was appreciative of the fact that to some extent Thatcher's establishment of Study Schools and a Correspondence Library had improved the external teaching services. Moreover, he recognised that Ringrose's proposals for a representative Board of Studies, his Country Study Centres and his teaching course methods had helped immeasurably to decentralise external teaching. They had transformed external students into the status of 'Part-time Country Undergraduates' with regularly organised tutorial systems of considerable educational value. [Olsen, 1966]

To Olsen, however, the provisions for distant students had to go much further if they were ever to have a 'fair and reasonable' equivalent teaching service that could be considered comparable to that offered on campus at the University of Queensland. One answer to that belief came within two years of his appointment as Director when the University of Queensland proposed the establishment of a University College in Townsville. It was in that direction that he saw opportunity to offer personal service in a distinctive way to the Queensland distant students.

With enthusiasm, he gave himself to the proposal and sought appointment as Warden of Townsville University College and wrote his Vice-Chancellor, offering his service in the following persuasive terms,

I am very interested in the challenge presented by this new venture of developing a University College in Townsville. I think with due humility that because of my knowledge of North Queensland and my administrative experience in the University of Queensland, I might be able to make a special contribution during the early and possibly somewhat difficult years of the work of the College. I set out below those qualifications I believe would enable me to perform to the satisfaction of the Senate the duties of Warden of the College.

After putting forward details of his professional competence for the position of Warden in terms of several degrees, his many publications in professional journals and five school textbooks (four as joint author) and his membership of many professional organisations, he went on to state,

In the event of my application being successful, I wonder if the Senate would consider the possibility of seconding me to Townsville for an initial period of two or three years and then allowing me to return to the Department of External Studies? I realise that this concession would present many difficulties, but I believe that, in Dr Goodman, I have an Assistant Director capable and willing to carry on my work during the period of my secondment, and this would lessen the disadvantages as far as the Department of External Studies is concerned.

I put this suggestion forward largely from the point of view of what is best for the University in terms of the way that I believe I can best serve the institution ...

[UQA. Sigd. F.J. Olsen, 16 September 1960]

His proposal was accepted and in reply C.J. Connell as Registrar expressed the good wishes of the Vice-Chancellor and Senate,

The University believes that your particular experience and qualifications will assist us in the many problems that are associated with the establishment of this first University College and hopes that you will enjoy your period as Warden.

[UQA. F.J. Olsen, letter, 11 November 1960]

Shortly afterwards, Olsen and his wife left for Townsville, leaving the administration of the Department of External Studies in the capable hands of Rupert D. Goodman as Acting Director during his absence in Townsville.

### **University College, Townsville**

On his arrival, Olsen set about his new duties of creating and establishing the University of Queensland's first University College. With almost missionary zeal, Olsen enveloped himself totally in the task of getting buildings completed to a time schedule, appointing academic and administrative staff, and planning an overall educational policy, as well as the detailed day-to-day planning.

A brief picture of some of the many frustrations that Olsen had to face and overcome in his customary tactful manner was presented a few years later by a succeeding Warden who wrote,

When lectures commenced in 1961 in buildings which were then still under construction, the staff consisted of ten lecturers and three demonstrators under the leadership of the first Warden, Dr. F.J. Olsen. The difficulties confronting the Warden and the foundation staff can scarcely be understood by those who have taken up duties at a later stage. Unexpected situations and frustrations were faced and overcome with such success that the College progressed far more rapidly than anticipated and a



*Frank J. Olsen (1904-1972)  
with Professor John R. Lavery (to the right)  
who succeeded him as the fifth Director  
of the Department of External Studies*

measure of this progress is given by the academic staff proposed for 1964 ... A pertinent fact which needs no comment is that the present staff establishment includes *all* the foundation lecturing staff.

[Back, 1963:5]

### **Professor Frank J. Olsen**

After a two-year stay as the chief administrator to the Townsville University College, Olsen returned to St. Lucia, whereupon he was promoted to Reader as from 1st January 1963. One year later, the Senate expressed grateful and unanimous thanks for his work in establishing the new University College and for his work as the Director of External Studies by granting him a personal professorial Chair.

Olsen's support for the University's policy of decentralisation encouraged him, on his return from Townsville, to strengthen Ringrose's initiative in setting up further University Country Centres. He believed that the Country Centres were a most important development for local external students. They encouraged study activities, local involvement and spread the influence of the University.

He made special effort to contact local Council officials, local business people and other influential people in major country towns. He endeavoured to persuade them to donate land, buildings and money to help establish and maintain educational centres for local adult students, especially those who wished to study externally at the University of Queensland. Such Study Centres had to be locally financed but under his educational guidance and control. This process ensured the appointment of appropriately qualified part-time staff for tutorials and library service.

Writing in 1966, Olsen stated that seven local libraries, now referred to as *The Ringrose Libraries* in memory of

the late director Ringrose, had been established and placed under the control of the Department. In Olsen's view, "... their value to the external student in these Centres is equalled only by the value of the decentralised tutorial system". [Olsen, 1966:11]

Several years later in April 1970 [DES Newsletter No. 26], Olsen could proudly claim that a total of 118 tutor groups had formed at twelve major Country Study Centres in Queensland with a further sixteen groups in Papua New Guinea and thirteen in Darwin. Through much cooperative work, he successfully established for external students a wide network of interrelated support groups from Citizens' Management Committees to Part-time Ringrose Librarians. External students in Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Mackay owe Olsen special thanks and recognition for his efforts to develop their University Study Centres.

His success in establishing Country Study Centres was no mean achievement, for not every country town welcomed increased burden on its limited finances. Much of the persuasive foundation work was due to Olsen's personal skill, friendly approach and organising ability in bringing about increased local recognition of the pressing educational needs of their young men and women.

### **Audio-visual Teaching**

Olsen during his years of teaching in New South Wales had often displayed interest in audio-visual methods of teaching and film-strip production of his own making. It was natural for him to involve himself and his academic colleagues in audio-visual learning and teaching, firstly by having installed within the Department of External Studies a multi-tape recording system, tape-recording machines for staff use, and then by establishing postal facilities so that tape-recording could become an integral part of external course teaching.

In 1966, Olsen strongly supported a telecommunication experiment, referred to as a 'Teleteaching Series'. It was a

two-way transmission set up by the use of microphones and loudspeakers which were connected to the telephone system, linking the University at St. Lucia with three University Country Centres of Gympie, Maryborough and Bundaberg. Although several academic departments took part in the experiment, in cooperation with the Department of External Studies and the Department of Education, the lack of financial support terminated further experimentation in this direction.

Three years later in 1969, Olsen, always hoping that more adequate financial support would be allocated to him to modernise the audio-visual teaching facilities, enthusiastically supported his staff in becoming involved in the University's Television Unit during the Annual Study School. The experimental use of the Unit gave his staff opportunity for lecturing in an atmosphere of bright lights, movie camera, tape recordings and other audio-visual techniques in close-circuit television teaching. He expressed the hope that such pilot schemes would lead to the use of public radio and television stations as he had seen operate from Open University in the United Kingdom. [DES Newsletter, No. 4, 1969]

### **The Olsen Study Schools**

During the years of his directorship, Olsen strove hard to make the Annual Study School the highlight of the year. It was a time when external students came from all parts of Queensland and beyond to meet academic staff both formally and informally, and to mingle with other students. His data for the 1969 Study School showed it to be the best-attended School up to that year, since its introduction by Thatcher in 1947 with 100 students.

According to Olsen's records, there were 950 external students registered, involving 26 academic staff from the Department of External Studies, and 7 Professors and 70 Lecturers from the internal teaching departments. Lectures and tutorials were provided in 27 subjects with about 300 lectures and 600 tutorials. Olsen made the comment in

appreciation of the cooperation offered to him,

The more important and the more significant fact is that so many senior staff of the University, during their short vacation were happy to come and meet and lecture to external students. They do so because external students made appreciative, constructively critical and questioning audiences.

[Director's Newsletter, No. 4, 1969, p. 4]

What he omitted to mention was his own excellent capacity to organise, administer and gain the cooperation of so many of his peers across the University. Nor did he refer to his own student popularity that pinnaced in the mass singing at the official dinner of the student concocted 'anthem' entitled, 'Frankie Olsen's Band'. On such moments as those, no one could doubt the students' love for their leader; the man who knew their problems, shared their difficulties and sought to encourage, stimulate and help them over the learning obstacles of attaining the prized goal of an examination 'pass'.

### **Continuing Expansion**

The desire for external studying at university level continued unabated. Each year, the external enrolment increased. On analysis, the largest group was still formed of teachers [Kitchen, 1969]. But in addition to the teacher-group of students, there were several others for whom the external system had become a professional life-line, offering further study and a source of personal interest for the more educated in the outback towns and districts of Queensland and beyond.

There were also students, living in Brisbane and area, who became externals from reasons of physical disability, domestic problems and long business hours. Among those providing the official regulated reasons were mature adults who preferred to receive well-designed academic teaching material that was delivered to their home. The popularity and value of the external material can be gauged from the



UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

## Director's Newsletter



*NEW UNIVERSITY CENTRE, ROCKHAMPTON (Situated on Top Floor—School of Arts)*

NEWSLETTER No. 2, 1967

*New University Centre, Rockhampton  
(Situated on top floor — School of Arts)  
Director's Newsletter No. 2, 1967*

not-infrequent notice in the Director's Newsletter, 'It is an offense to offer for sale external course material'.

The success of the external studies system was becoming an embarrassment to the University of Queensland as each year's enrolment added further strain and stress to limited financial resources. Criticism of the correspondence system among internal academics had never ceased over the years, but with the appointment of F.J. Schonell as the new Vice-Chancellor in 1960, their voices were being heard more strongly and calls were made for assessment.

In 1965, a survey into the number of students who withdrew from their courses revealed that 34 per cent of external students cancelled one or more subjects or failed to sit for the final examination. Among the evening students in the same subjects, the drop-out rate was 33 per cent, while for day students, their cancellation rate was only 12 per cent. Among the external students, the survey showed the drop-out rate decreased to 10 per cent at the third-year level. The highest percentage of external students (34 per cent) gave 'lack of time' as their reason for withdrawal. [Meddleton, 1965]

In 1966, for example, it was reported [Teakle, 1967] that there were nearly three thousand external students at the University of Queensland, but the enrolment was mainly limited to only a few faculties as follows,

|           |       |                       |
|-----------|-------|-----------------------|
| Arts      | 993   | 37%                   |
| Education | 1,133 | 40%                   |
| Commerce  | 208   | 8%                    |
| Economics | 237   | 9%                    |
| Law       | 140   | 5%                    |
| Science   | 46    | 1% (Mathematics only) |
|           | 2,757 | 100%                  |

Kitchen (1969) reported that the percentage of 'pass' rate at annual examination for external students followed the same kind of distribution as for the student body as a total group. External students gained the same percentage of 'passes' and 'credits' as internal students. If there were any differences, some fewer external students reached the 'distinction' level.

The following table was given to show comparable results of the day, evening and external students who sat the same examination in November, 1966, and reflected the success of this kind of teaching service to the Queensland community.

| <i>Results</i>      | <i>Number of students<br/>sitting the same examination</i> |     |                |     |                 |     |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|                     | <i>Day</i>                                                 |     | <i>Evening</i> |     | <i>External</i> |     |
| High Distinction    | 59                                                         | 2%  | 30             | 1%  | 24              | 1%  |
| Distinction         | 177                                                        | 6%  | 108            | 5%  | 90              | 5%  |
| Credit              | 718                                                        | 25% | 399            | 19% | 418             | 21% |
| Pass                | 1,301                                                      | 45% | 950            | 45% | 993             | 56% |
| Overall 'pass' rate | 2,255                                                      | 78% | 1,487          | 70% | 1,525           | 78% |

### **The Teakle Report**

In spite of the very successfully expanding external teaching service, the tide of circumstance and events were working against the external students and the staff who wished to serve them. If the number of external students continued to increase, so did the numbers of day and evening students, attending the University at St. Lucia. Both groups made many claims upon the limited financial resources allocated to the University of Queensland.

In addition, many questions were being raised about the professional training of teachers who formed the largest group of externals. The Australian College of Education

had conducted an Australia-wide survey and the report reflected the need for improved training establishments, better and more appropriately trained student-teachers, especially at secondary level, and more opportunity for in-service courses with a future view of an all-graduate professional body of teachers. [A.C.E., 1966]

Comparisons were also being made between the excellent educational courses offered by specialist staff to external students in the United Kingdom by the 'Open University'. References were enviously made to the U.K. extensive television and radio support when compared with that available in Queensland. [Olsen, 1970]

There were academic teaching staff at the University of Queensland who thought that the external service should be curtailed or even terminated, believing that correspondence teaching at tertiary level was unsatisfactory and inferior. Their views were not supported either by the employers of external students or by the large body of external students, who often expressed thanks for the opportunity to study.

Nevertheless, in response to criticism, shortage of university funds and the need to reconsider university policy towards external teaching, F.J. Schonell, as Vice-Chancellor, requested the Board of External Studies to set up a major professorial committee under the Chairmanship of Professor L.J.H. Teakle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, with a view to collecting data, evaluating the external studies system and reporting on future policy to be adopted by the University of Queensland.

The Teakle Committee reported in June 1967, and as part of their argument, they referred specifically to the Martin Report, 1964, which did not envisage external studies as "a university function" and implied that "the universities should progressively withdraw from external teaching". Nevertheless, the Teakle Committee, without much enthusiasm for external teaching, pointed out that

the Robert Menzies Government had rejected the Martin recommendations.

It is highly probable that the views of the Menzies Government were nearer to the opinions of the average external student who so often seeks a second educational chance. Most mature-aged externals want opportunity for further study without the rigid lecture timetables, the forced attendance at lectures and without imposed 'teacher' authority.

It was stated in the Report [Teakle, 1967:6] that the Committee's formation was prompted by, (i) a concern for the rising external enrolment and the problems of making adequate provisions from limited financial resources, (ii) the need to ensure educational quality rather than quantity, (iii) the desire to concentrate on internal day students who on average were younger than the external. To some, however, the Committee was heavily professorial and not representative of university opinion about external teaching. Their policy was economically pre-programmed to reduce university expenditure on external teaching for the community at large, and to emphasise the internal teaching facilities on campus.

The Teakle Committee recommended the continuation of the Department of External Studies and the current range of courses in the different faculties, but with several restrictions, especially under recommendations 2 and 5, worded as follows,

- 2 The University should restrict initial enrolments after 1967 to students resident in Queensland, except where special arrangements to the contrary have been made between the Senate and a Governmental authority.
- 5 The Board of External Studies should be requested to draft a rule concerning enrolment of students

who live and/or work in the Brisbane metropolitan area restricting external enrolment to students unable to attend lectures because of medical incapacity or some other special disability.

[Teakle, 1967:2]

As a result of the Teakle Committee's recommendations the external enrolment dropped by 1971 to 10.87 per cent of the total student population. In total numbers, the day students were recorded as 8,210, part-time evening as 5,880, and part-time external as 3,474, amounting to a total student population of 17,564. During the day, the concentration of university facilities was upon the younger student; during the evening the concentration of facilities was upon the metropolitan adult student. Both groups were taught by the internal academic teaching staff from whom came most of the criticism about external teaching.

It could be said that the Teakle Committee put aside the democratic ideals of equality and justice for all students of the 1909 Act to serve academic prejudice. Little consideration was given to allowing adult students to select the methods of learning that most suited their needs and learning processes. Of more significance was the belief that although the academic staff of the Department of External Studies were appointed on the basis of equal qualifications, their past image of being 'efficient reporters' to their internal counterparts, lingered on to their detriment and rejection within the academic arena.

### **The Council of the Department of External Studies**

Professor Olsen was well aware that most of his well-qualified staff of some 30 members or more were all appointed at Lecturer grade or below and, while in the Department, stayed at that level of appointment. He also knew that few, if any, members of his academic staff were involved in post-graduate teaching, student research supervision, honours-class teaching or given any opportunity to become involved in more demanding work of their academic discipline in the internal departments.

When a staff member was appointed to the Department of External Studies he or she was expected to teach large numbers of undergraduates in groups of two to three hundred students at no higher level than first and second year, with some third year work for a few staff members. In derogatory university staff terms, some members of the Department of External Studies had the feeling of being the 'dumb dumbs' or the rejects who never made the promotion grade to an internal department.

As far as possible, Olsen encouraged his staff, even from the first day of appointment to his Department, to seek promotion to senior lecturer level by strongly supporting their applications for internal appointments. Many senior academics within the University of Queensland started their university career by using the correspondence department as their first 'stepping-stone' to advancement. The effect upon the quality of external teaching and academic acceptance was demoralising and denigrating to the remaining departmental staff, especially those with a particular interest in external teaching.

Olsen, while accepting the Teakle recommendations, wrote critically of the unfair and restrictive treatment, and within a few years sought new policies and a re-organisation of his Department and its teaching. To the external students, he wrote,

It seems to be that the time is opportune for fresh examination by an expert committee with representatives of Senate, of the Professorial Board and Staff Association and others to report on the function and purpose of the Department, at least for the next decade.

[Director's Newsletter No. 4, October 1970, p. 15]

In support of his academic staff, their expertise and ability to produce good quality external material, he argued that they should be academically free to teach 'equivalent' courses, rather than follow the existing process of

'identity', or the copying of internal courses. In addition, from criticism of a number of external courses produced by disinterested internal academics, he believed that all external teaching should be transferred to the Department of External Studies with its specialist staff who has a commitment to that mode of learning and teaching. [Olsen, DES, February 1971]

Finally at this period, through frustration, lack of promotional opportunities, heavy teaching work-loads and inability to find outlets for more advanced academic work, his staff sought to redress their academic rejection. With Olsen's support, they formed themselves in 1971 into a 'Council of the Department of External Studies' to give more positive direction to departmental policy.

It was staff belief that a democratically elected representative body, such as the Council, would be better able to put forward their points of view than the single voice of a Director. And so, on behalf of the staff and the external students and their right to 'fair and reasonable' treatment, the Council pushed for academic equality and peer acceptance. Their challenge to the prevailing conditions brought reaction, and in March 1971, the Vice-Chancellor appointed a committee into the future of the Department of External Studies under the Chairmanship of Professor E.C. Webb.

### **In Conclusion**

It was around this time that the health of Professor Frank Olsen started to fail, and before the Vice-Chancellor's committee could report on its findings, he was forced to offer his resignation as from 27th November 1971. Shortly afterwards, in grateful recognition of his valuable contribution to the University of Queensland and its external services, the title of 'Emeritus Professor' was conferred upon him.

Unfortunately, after undergoing surgery and deep-ray therapy, Olsen's health declined rapidly, though in face of

death, he maintained a stoic presence with a ready smile for a visitor. In early August of 1972, he quietly slipped away, leaving colleagues, relatives and friends to attend a simple service in the West Chapel of Mount Thompson crematorium on 8th August 1972 and so pay their last tribute to a man they loved and respected in life.

Perhaps the last words should be left to his close working colleague, John Laverty, who wrote of him at the time,

Frank Olsen will always be remembered for his kindness and generosity. He was a friend to all with whom he was associated, staff and students alike. People in all parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory, Papua New Guinea will always be grateful for the encouragement and help he gave them.

[DES Newsletter, No. 1, August 1972, p. 3]

And so closed a chapter in the developing story of one of the most unique academic departments in the University of Queensland and possibly in any part of the university world. Now at the end of the first 75 years of operation, the founders and their vision live on in the minds of many grateful external students for whom they struggled to secure educational opportunity at university level.

## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

This brief review of the contributions made to the development of external studies by the four Directors of the Department of External Studies is based upon information extracted from University of Queensland publications, University of Queensland archives and other reference sources.

In its preparation, I wish to thank most sincerely those who so willingly read the draft, gave generous support and offered suggestions. But, I accept full responsibility for comments about events as herein recorded.

Ronald D. Kitchen May 1985

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                         mental status.

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                         gust 1969.  
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**The University of Queensland**  
**The Department of External Studies**

| <i>Directors</i>       | <i>Born</i>  | <i>Appointed</i> | <i>Retired</i> | <i>Died</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Jones, Thomas E.       | 1864         | July 1911        | March 1938     | Aug. 1948   |
| Thatcher, Thomas       | 1886         | Feb. 1938        | —              | May 1948    |
| Ringrose, Edward C. D. | 1899         | Jan. 1950        | —              | May 1957    |
| Olsen, Frank J.        | 1904         | March 1958       | Nov. 1971      | Aug. 1972   |
| <hr/>                  |              |                  |                |             |
| Laverty, John R.       | 1974 to 1981 |                  |                |             |
| Chick, John D.         | 1981         |                  |                |             |